

CHAPTER 1

Executive Summary

The I-405, SR 169 to I-90—Renton to Bellevue Project,

commonly referred to as the Renton to Bellevue Project, is part of the overall I-405 Corridor Program. The Corridor Program is the long-range mobility strategy or Master Plan for I-405. The Corridor Program is being implemented over the next twenty to thirty years in a partnership among WSDOT, the cities and counties along the corridor, and regional and federal transportation agencies. The overall improvement program balances highway, transit, and arterial projects and will offer a range of mobility options for travelers and freight movement on the I-405 Corridor.

Where is the Renton to Bellevue Project located?

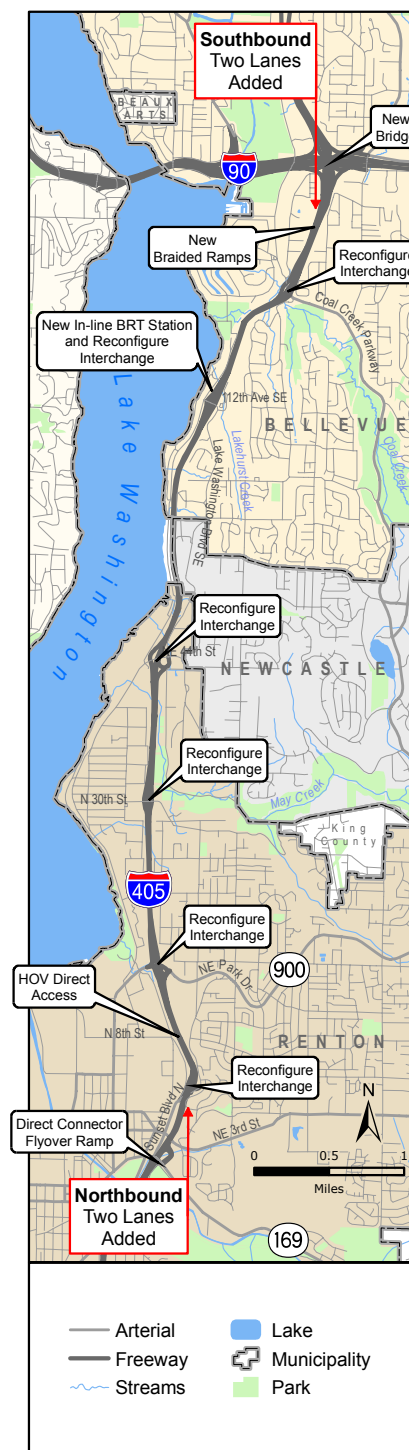
The Renton to Bellevue Project extends approximately 8 miles (milepost 3.8 to milepost 11.9) from SR 169 north to the northern on- and off-ramps of the I-90 interchange (see Exhibit 1-1).

What is the Renton to Bellevue Project?

The principal features of the Renton to Bellevue Project (also referred to as the Build Alternative) are:

- Addition of two new general-purpose lanes on I-405 in each direction from SR 169 through the I-90 interchange;
- Realignment of I-405 to bring it up to current freeway standards where feasible;
- Construction of a new in-line bus rapid transit (BRT) station in the vicinity of 112th Avenue SE;
- Construction of a transit/high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) direct access ramp at N 8th Street in coordination with Sound Transit;
- Realignment and reconfiguration of eight interchanges;
- Changes to local roadways related to interchange improvements and I-405 widening;

Exhibit 1-1: Project overview



- Construction of stormwater management facilities; and
- Application of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) to incorporate visual and community-oriented features into the project design.

The project description is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Why are we building this project?

The Renton to Bellevue Project is a part of a comprehensive strategy to reduce traffic congestion and improve mobility along the state's second-busiest highway. Project benefits include:

- Shortening periods of congestion on I-405 between Renton and Bellevue;
- Increasing transit reliability and safety with the addition of a new in-line station, direct access ramps, and other transit improvements;
- Improving operations at eight interchanges;
- Improving water quality conditions in the project area by treating approximately 290 acres of new and existing impervious surfaces;
- Providing benefits to endangered salmon species by improving water quality;
- Improving fish passage by replacing culverts or installing new fish-friendly structures on many streams within the area;
- Constructing four new noise walls and relocating five existing walls; and
- Implementing CSS design principles to improve appearance and compatibility with surrounding communities.



Springbrook Creek



Culvert in the project area

When will construction begin and how long will it take?

Construction is expected to take place in multiple construction steps, with the entire construction project lasting at least five years. WSDOT expects that during the first stage, traffic will be maintained on the current roadway while the new roadway is constructed to the outside. During subsequent steps, traffic will be shifted to the newly constructed portion so that we can remove and reconstruct the existing lanes.

How will the project affect the built environment?

Based on the analyses conducted, there will be no substantial adverse effects on the built environment as a result of the project. The following discussion highlights findings of Sections 5.1 through 5.7 of this environmental assessment:

Traffic – Although future traffic volumes will increase, traffic congestion will lessen, and there will be fewer delays with the Build Alternative. If the project is not built, the flow of traffic will become so constrained that the delays would force drivers wishing to travel on I-405 to seek alternative routes or forego some trips altogether.

Noise – For all locations that exceeded the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) criterion of 67 dBA, we evaluated the effectiveness of noise walls to reduce the noise. Noise walls will be constructed at locations where they were found to be feasible and reasonable and are supported by the majority of local residents.

Land Use – Construction activities will temporarily affect adjacent residences, businesses, and users of the local street system because of factors such as noise and traffic delays. These temporary effects will last only as long as construction does and will not affect long-term development potential or development patterns. Some existing land uses will actually benefit as a result of transportation system improvements that provide easier access and better traffic flow.

Community, Neighborhoods, and Businesses – The project will have minor effects on communities, neighborhoods, and businesses within the project area. It is estimated that WSDOT will acquire approximately 44 acres of vacant, residential, commercial, and public property for right of way.

Environmental Justice – WSDOT examined the demographics of the study area to gain insight on the presence and needs of minority and low-income populations. Our analysis determined that the project will not have disproportionately high or adverse effects on these populations.

Recreational Resources – The project will temporarily affect Gene Coulon Park and Newcastle Beach Park during construction. Freeway widening will require that the Lake Washington Trail be realigned in several locations. In addition, partial trail closures or detours will occur during



Newport Hills Park and Ride



Renton Transit Center



Utility worker

construction. Approximately 10,000 square feet of Coal Creek Park will be used to widen Coal Creek Parkway.

Public Services and Utilities – Construction will be phased to keep access points and crossings open during construction. Temporary detours or lane closures through the construction zones are expected, causing school buses and those accessing public health and social service facilities in the area to experience minor delays. Once the project is built, the increased capacity on I-405 will benefit public services by improving access to service locations and reducing travel times for emergency vehicles.

Visual Quality – The project will result in minor changes in the visual quality experienced by I-405 users and neighbors. Freeway users will notice an increase in walls and pavement and a subsequent decrease in visual quality. Many neighbors west of I-405 look uphill toward the freeway; once project improvements are complete, these neighbors will see more of the freeway, primarily raised structures such as retaining walls, noise walls, and access ramps. Overall, visual quality will be minimally affected.

How will the project affect the natural environment?

Based on the analyses conducted, there will be no substantial adverse effects on the natural environment as a result of the project. The following discussion highlights findings of Sections 5.8 through 5.14 of this environmental assessment:

Air Quality – There will be no substantial air quality effects as a result of the Renton to Bellevue Project. The project will conform to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) and the air quality maintenance plans for ozone and carbon monoxide (CO) established for the Puget Sound region. Our studies concluded that CO levels at several high volume intersections will be substantially lower than the NAAQS standard for both one-hour and eight-hour concentrations.

Water Resources – The Renton to Bellevue Project will collect and treat rainfall runoff from the new pavement as well as from the existing roadway and replaced pavement. The project will improve water quality and conveyance and reduce some localized flooding potential. Specific measures are included in the project to avoid effects to the Cedar Valley Sole Source Aquifer. Enhanced water quality treatment will be provided for the proposed 124 acres of new impervious surface, and 162

acres of presently untreated areas. Construction may cause some temporary, minor water quality effects. The project will treat approximately 176 percent of new impervious surface.

Wetlands – Approximately 0.5 acres of wetlands will be temporarily disturbed, which WSDOT will restore after construction. Construction will result in the permanent loss of 5.5 acres of wetlands. WSDOT will mitigate these displaced wetlands by creating wetland mitigation in Renton and Bellevue.

Wildlife and Vegetation – The permanent loss of approximately 130 acres of vegetation will cause some urban wildlife to move elsewhere to find available habitat. Approximately another 100 acres of vegetation will be removed during construction and replaced once construction is complete.

Fish and Aquatic Resources – Project engineers have designed the Renton to Bellevue Project to avoid or minimize effects, and to provide mitigation for any unavoidable effects. As a result, the project will have no substantial adverse effects on fish or aquatic resources. By design, the Renton to Bellevue Project will have beneficial effects on the Cedar River, May Creek, Clover Creek, Coal Creek, and Gypsy Creek. The benefits include restoring fish passage, improving instream habitat, improving water quality by treating stormwater runoff, and removing existing instream obstructions such as pipes and screens.

Construction activities will temporarily displace resident fish in areas when in-water construction work is necessary. However, long-term benefits will offset these temporary effects.

Geology and Soils – Construction will involve substantial earthwork, including major cuts and fills. If cut material is suitable, it will be reused in areas of the project that require fill; however, excavated soils that are unsuitable for reuse will be disposed of offsite. Effects on geology and soils in the project area can be managed using standard construction techniques. Several design and construction elements have been incorporated into the project to address landslide-prone areas located along the project alignment.

Hazardous Materials and Wastes – We identified twenty potentially-contaminated sites near I-405 for detailed analysis, including three “substantially contaminated” properties. The remaining seventeen sites are considered to be “reasonably



Ecology embankment under construction



Wooded area near May Creek

predictable” properties with respect to presenting a potential for the presence of hazardous materials. Because hazardous material quantities are expected to be small and contaminants are localized, they are unlikely to affect the project.



Clover Creek

Cumulative Effects – Construction effects on air quality could include temporary increases in particulate emissions. Operation of the project will be in compliance with National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), and some measures of air quality will improve.

Cumulative effects on surface waters resulting from construction activities could include some increased runoff and increased peak flows. Cumulatively, there will be more impervious surface in the basins. However, operation of the Renton to Bellevue Project will improve water quality in the area slightly as a result of the treatment of new and existing pavement in basins where runoff currently receives little treatment. Improvements in surface water quality and stream flows in the area also may offset some minor adverse cumulative effects on wetlands.



Geologists survey alongside freeway

Minor, temporary, and long-term loss of aquatic habitat could occur as a result of the projects evaluated for cumulative effects. The Renton to Bellevue Project will minimally reduce these cumulative effects on fish and aquatic resources through provision of several fish passage improvements. Overall, cumulative effects on fish and aquatic resources are expected to be of a low magnitude.

How is this Environmental Assessment organized?

Chapters 2 and 3 of this Environmental Assessment explain why this project is needed and provide a background into the alternatives developed as part of the I-405 Corridor Program. We have also organized this document so that the affected environment, potential effects, and proposed measures to avoid or minimize effects are grouped together for individual topics in Chapter 5. A detailed description of project design features is included in Appendix A, and a glossary defining the technical terms used can be found in Appendix B. We have also included a list of project commitments in Appendix F.

We have written this Environmental Assessment in a format that is different from many that you may have read in the past. We have eliminated technical jargon and replaced scientific and engineering terms with commonly used language.